

## COMMAND HISTORY

### STRIKE FIGHTER SQUADRON EIGHT SIX



Strike Fighter Squadron EIGHT SIX traces its origins to Fighter Squadron 921, based at Naval Air Station St. Louis, Missouri, during the Korean War in February 1951. In February 1953, the squadron was re-designated VF-84 while deployed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, aboard USS ANTIETAM (CV 36). In July 1955, the squadron was re-designated VA-86 Sidewinders.

From 1955 to 1987, Sidewinders flew the F4-U "Corsair," F8F-2 "Bearcat," F9F-5 "Panther," F7U-3M "Cutlass," also known as the "Ensign Eater," A4D-1 "Skyhawk" and A-7A/C/E "Corsair." During these transitions, Sidewinders made numerous deployments to the Mediterranean and Caribbean Seas, the North Atlantic, the Western Pacific and the Indian Oceans in various aircraft carriers, including USS ANTIETAM (CV 36), USS BENNINGTON (CV 20), USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN (CV 39), USS FORRESTAL (CV 59), USS RANDOLPH (CV 15), USS INDEPENDENCE (CV 62), USS INTREPID (CV 11), USS LEXINGTON (CV 16), USS AMERICA (CV 66), USS CORAL SEA (CV 43), and USS NIMITZ (CVN 68).

In September 1969 Sidewinders made an emergency sortie aboard AMERICA for a ten month combat deployment to Southeast Asia. The squadron was once again on "Yankee Station" in the Tonkin Gulf when the Paris Peace Accords were signed and our Prisoners of War finally returned home. This was the squadron's fourth combat deployment to Southeast Asia, more than any other East Coast attack squadron. During that deployment, Sidewinders participated in the most intense air combat encountered throughout their extensive Southeast Asian involvement, earning the Meritorious Unit Commendation.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, as a part of the NIMITZ team, Sidewinders made numerous deployments to the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. Sidewinders were awarded the 1982 COMNAVAIRLANT Battle "E," denoting the best A-7E squadron on the East Coast. Sidewinders were awarded the 1985 Admiral Wade McClusky Award, signifying the best attack squadron in the Navy. In June of 1987, after a cameo appearance in the Hollywood film Final Countdown, Sidewinders departed NIMITZ and transitioned to the FA-18C Hornet, re-designated Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 86. Deployed with the Navy's premier strike fighter, in 1989 Sidewinders spent eight months with the Carrier Air Wing ONE (CVW-1) "TARBOX" team aboard AMERICA.

As the Cold War ended, the 1990s nevertheless brought threats to U.S. and allied interests throughout the world. In 1991 the Sidewinders took to the skies to liberate Kuwait during Operation DESERT STORM. Sidewinders delivered over 1.2 million pounds of ordnance with zero combat losses. In late 1995, Sidewinders again faced combat, this time in Operation DELIBERATE FORCE over the embattled former Yugoslavia. During that decade's sustained Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, hundreds of combat sorties and precision strikes were flown over Iraq, employing weapons against radar installations and anti-aircraft artillery emplacements that violated United Nations Security Council resolutions. While proving their lethality in the 90s, Sidewinders underscored their professionalism by taking home the CNO's Safety "S" Award in 1995 and the Battle "E" in 1998.



In March 1999, following a successful deployment in USS JOHN F. KENNEDY (CV 67), Sidewinders moved from NAS Cecil Field, Florida, to their new home at Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, South Carolina. Deployed in USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) immediately following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the TARBOX team was ready on arrival in the Arabian Sea to execute sustained combat missions in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF). After providing vital air support to coalition forces toppling a hostile regime in Afghanistan, Sidewinders departed the area of operation having flown over 3,500 hours and expended over 213 tons of ordnance. After 160 days without a port call, Sidewinders completed another successful combat deployment while establishing the naval aviation record for continuous days at sea. In August of 2003, VFA-86 deployed in USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and OEF. Returning in early 2004, Sidewinders sailed again in June 2004 for SUMMER PULSE, a two-month deployment to the North Atlantic as part of Navy's Fleet Response Plan.

Preparing for a mid-2006 deployment with the TARBOX / ENTERPRISE team, Sidewinders plunged into an aggressive work-up for its Sailors and Hornets. Following a January 2005 detachment aboard THEODORE ROOSEVELT and a March 2005 detachment to Cannon AFB, New Mexico, for Operation ROVING SANDS, the squadron completed a transfer of 12 LOT X FA-18Cs and acceptance of 10 LOT XVIII FA-18C Hornets.

Sidewinders embarked with ENTERPRISE Strike Group in May 2006. Over the next seven months, across three Fleets, the squadron proved its combat readiness providing vital close air support to coalition ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and presence operations in the western Pacific. While flying OIF and OEF missions, Sidewinders expended 33 precision guided bombs and over 3,300 20 millimeter high explosive incendiary rounds with unmatched effectiveness. The Sidewinder team achieved success in combat receiving the Meritorious Unit Commendation and proudly brought home CVW-1 "Top Hook" honors for superior carrier landing performance in November 2006.

Through the Spring of 2007, the squadron continued its rigorous pace in preparation for its next deployment. In March, 2007, Sidewinders embarked in ENTERPRISE for two weeks, during which CVW-1 squadrons participated in large force exercises. The month of April was spent in Fallon, Nevada, working to increase squadron and air wing efficiency in efforts to once again become a deployable combined fighting force. During May and June, the Sidewinders again embarked in ENTERPRISE for sustainment training.

In July of 2007, VFA-86 deployed with ENTERPRISE Strike Group in support of OIF and OEF. During the five and a half month deployment, the Sidewinders served the nation with 328 combat missions and over 3,000 total flight hours. The Sidewinders achieved 100% combat mission effectiveness, and an air wing-leading 98% sortie completion rate. Sidewinders returned to MCAS Beaufort in December of 2007. Sidewinders were awarded the Commander, Naval Air Forces U.S. Atlantic Fleet Safety "S" for 2007.

In the fall of 2008, Sidewinders will change operational commanders and join CVW-11 in NIMITZ. With a successful detachment to Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, in April and a detachment to Key West in July, the squadron continued to sharpen its skills in preparation for their next combat deployment.



**NEVER LET UP!**